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Ochs, Adolph Simon

Melville E. Stone,  
General Manager ...

[New York]

[1918]

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# Melville E. Stone

*General Manager The Associated Press*

*Remarks of*

ADOLPH S. OCHS

*at the Annual Luncheon of The Associated Press,*

*Tuesday, April 23, 1918, New York City.*

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Jan 3, 1919 AET

**Mr. President and Members of The  
Associated Press:**

Many compliments have been paid you, Melville E. Stone, but I am confident none more genuine than I now am tendering by rising to deliver a speech. Public speaking is not my forte, and it has such terror for me that I quake even when in danger of a call. That I now consent to do so rises from such a deep sense of duty to one who is so deserving that I am now inflicting this ordeal on myself.

I am impelled to say a few words to express what I regard as an obligation of the members of The Associated Press to Melville E. Stone, who has served them for twenty-five years with a fidelity that had no reservations and with ability that can best be characterized as genius.

The date of my first acquaintance with Mr. Stone is coincident with his entering the service of The Associated Press—twenty-five years ago. He then introduced me at a banquet in Chicago as the “Baby Member,” and I am now privileged to return the compliment and name him the “Father of The Associated Press,” for that he is

—in every sense implied by a proper definition of that term.

Twenty-five years ago, when Melville E. Stone undertook to father them, every member of The Associated Press of Illinois was a baby member. How fortunate was that day for The A. P.; in fact, for all the newspaper-makers of the country and for the general welfare! He has made The Associated Press a happy, contented, prosperous family, however much the members of its household may differ in opinion, temperament, habits and point of view.

The Associated Press today is one of the monumental achievements of the age. We little appreciate its potentiality, its importance as a factor in our civilization, its superb organization, its honesty, integrity and practice of the highest standards in news gathering. We accept now as a matter of course that enlightened public opinion regards the reports of The Associated Press as reliable, trustworthy and scrupulously honest, fair and impartial. That this is so is due in a large measure to the integrity, genius, ability and self-sacrifice of Melville E. Stone.

I am mindful that the disinterestedness of The Associated Press has been at times questioned by men and interests from a variety of angles, but

to its everlasting fame never once was the criticism ignored, while its critics have been quickly challenged and in every instance have readily withdrawn any reflection on the integrity of the service.

The Associated Press has hundreds of employes, and many have left the service for various reasons, principally more pay (The Associated Press is not an over-generous paymaster.) Did you ever hear an employe or an ex-employe speak of the service other than with respect and admiration for its integrity? Perhaps there are some who do not include efficiency in their praise, perchance in many cases because their point of view was rejected. Do not understand me to imply there is no criticism or just grounds for it in some instances, yet this criticism, so far as my knowledge goes, after fifteen years of service as a member of your Board of Directors, applies to minor matters, and when just, the remedy was speedily applied.

One of the members of this Association, who for years was indifferent, if not antagonistic, to the organization and its management and never lost an opportunity boastfully to endeavor to surpass its achievements in big news, being notable for a series of such feats, has completely reversed its unfriendly attitude and now ungrudgingly over-

whelms The Associated Press, and particularly Mr. Stone, with praise for the fullness and accuracy of its reports, and now surpasses all newspapers in the conspicuous manner in which credit is given to The Associated Press in every important item of its news.

And speaking of criticism, let me give you a recent instance which is characteristic of most of the criticism:

A member of this Association, a man of national fame, complained that Melville E. Stone's political bias was affecting the reports of The Associated Press, and he cited as an example that in the recent Senatorial primary election in Wisconsin a dispatch from some town in that State (I forgot the name) describing a meeting there referred to Mr. Lenroot as the "so-called loyalist candidate." The A. P. member objected to the word "so-called," as he believed it was used to qualify Mr. Lenroot's loyalty, when the fact was Mr. Lenroot's adherents were themselves attaching the label "loyalist candidate" as applied to him. How else should the reporter have designated him if he was to be classified as the text of the dispatch required? But the use or misuse of the word "so-called" was of little importance compared to the hasty conclusion

that Melville E. Stone was personally responsible for the objectionable word. It implied that a member believed that the 100,000 or more words daily transmitted over The Associated Press wire were written or edited personally by Mr. Stone. He was not content simply with making a complaint, but at once sought to charge a base motive, and without a scintilla of evidence. In fact, Mr. Stone was at the time absent from his office by reason of illness. This was captious criticism, yet it was as unwarranted as most of the criticism leveled at Mr. Stone and the Association.

How often have members omitted something from The Associated Press report because the report, though truthful, did not square with their political predilections or seemed too favorable to the side they were opposing? If such there be, I will hazard the guess that the other fellow did it just as often, and by this statement I wish to illustrate that The Associated Press plays no favorites. It gives the news, and knows no friends or foes, and has no concern as to the effect of happenings and events honestly reported. Its reports are only restricted by truth, decency and patriotism—and this is Melville E. Stone's code.

As to its accuracy and legal limitations I need only refer to the fact that

libel suits have cost The Associated Press a negligible sum. In fact, there never has been a substantial sum realized in a libel suit against The Associated Press, and altogether, not a half dozen suits these past twenty-five years. "Libel suit judgments have cost The Associated Press in the last twenty-five years less than the expenditure for lead pencils in the same period."

Indulge me a few minutes to say a word concerning The Associated Press—itself. There is a popular superstition that the Associated Press is a monopoly. Yes, it is in the sense that a family monopolizes its personal possessions and its co-ordination; that is if it co-ordinates. I wish to remind you that The Associated Press is, in fact, a family, a club, for it is incorporated as a social club under the State laws of New York. The primary purpose of a social club is to bring into association congenial persons. It is their personality that constitutes all that makes the club congenial. To force an objectionable member into such a club impairs its purpose. So with The Associated Press. It consists of kindred interests united for mutual advantage where each and every one contributes voluntary personal service. Each giving a part of himself to

make a thing greater collectively than they can create individually. It is a service that cannot be imposed by law, even though The Associated Press is impressed with a public interest. Governmental supervision can extend only to good conduct so that the power created is not to be misused. It cannot be successfully contended that in law or morals it should be under Government control and made to conform to the requirements of a common carrier, for that cannot be done except by the exercise of the powers of a master over a slave; that is if personal service is to be exacted and otherwise there cannot be an Associated Press such as now exists.

So in a legal sense The Associated Press is not a monopoly, but it would become worse than one could it be made a common carrier, for then it would destroy competition and become an instrument of personal judgment and prejudices and create a control of the press that would menace our liberty.

I have been very apprehensive for the future of The Associated Press and its power for useful public service by the tendency encouraged by the Board of Directors to increase the membership under the pressure of competition and in this purpose attempt to supply the varied news wants

of too many more newspapers, thus weakening the service in adjusting it to the needs of so many and discouraging individual enterprise and initiative. But that is another question.

However, before leaving the subject, let me say something regarding the value of membership in The Associated Press and to express it in dollars and cents. How many of you have included or wished to include your membership in The Associated Press as invested capital in your report to the United States Government for the excess profit tax? And how much of that value which you expressed or imagined must you attribute to the management of Melville E. Stone? Have you ever thought of that?

In this connection a thought occurs to me that perhaps may be of some value in answering the question of invested capital in newspaper properties. There is a prevailing opinion that good will is an intangible asset, and if possessed by the creator has no value in the eyes of the inquisitors of the Treasury Department, but in case the creator has parted with it, it has an exemption value equal to the amount paid by the purchaser.

But with respect to membership in The Associated Press it might be worth while to submit to the Tax Col-

lector the suggestion that it is something paid for in personal service. The service rendered can be claimed as an actual outlay which has not been heretofore taken note of and consequently was not deducted as an expense and is now a capital charge. In other words, what each member contributed of personal service in creating The Associated Press is accumulated capital, and its value is represented in the saleable price of such Associated Press membership.

But I am wandering afield. I was speaking of Melville E. Stone and his relation to The Associated Press. I wonder how many of the members of the Association ever think of the value created for them by Mr. Stone's genius for news gathering, organization and executive duties! I, for one, wish to acknowledge my appreciation and gratitude, for I realize that no small contribution to the re-establishment of The New York Times was the news service of The Associated Press, and when I say "Associated Press" I have in mind what has been true these past many years; that The Associated Press and Melville E. Stone are in effect synonymous terms.

The success of The Associated Press is Melville E. Stone's success. The Association is stamped all over with Stone's handiwork, his thought,

his ideals, his abilities and his sense of public service. It is his monument, and may it ever endure on the foundation that he builded so masterly and with so much sagacity and self-sacrifice. I emphasize the much abused word "self-sacrifice," for in the case of Melville E. Stone and his relation to The Associated Press it is applicable in its true significance. He might have been a captain of industry, a banker of great repute, an important member of a President's cabinet or an ambassador extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary at one of the chief courts in Europe. And who knows but that had he been the latter, this world's calamity might have been averted. I am not indulging in a flight of imagination. I also know that a great publisher offered him a substantial fortune to undertake the management of his affairs, and this was one of many similar seductive offers. But they offered Melville E. Stone no temptation. He was wedded to his idol—The Associated Press—for he worships it, dreams of it, and it occupies all his thoughts during his waking hours. He cherishes it, he nourishes it, he suffers for it and truly spiritualizes it. His work for The Associated Press is to him congenial employment, and in it he realizes every good man's highest ambition—public service. He

gives the cause the best that is in him; in fact gives himself wholly. His personality inspires the whole organization from top to bottom. There is no man in the service of The Associated Press who has not been impressed with the management's demand for honesty, impartiality and thoroughness. Subordinates take their cue from their superiors. Secure the confidence of the rank and file in the integrity of its head and you have an invincible army for carrying forward any great enterprise or people massed for good purposes.

I grant you that in the management of The Associated Press Mr. Stone had the benefit of the advice and counsel of many men who stand foremost in American journalism, and who gave their splendid services and the benefit of their ripe experience to The Associated Press without any remuneration other than what they shared with their fellow-members. Too much praise cannot be given them, and they should have a big place in the history of The Associated Press and be gratefully remembered by all of us who now enjoy the invaluable privileges of this Association arising from their work. But nevertheless, that there were courageous, able, self-sacrificing men associated with Mr. Stone in forming The Associated Press

and bringing it to its present high estate and efficiency abates in no respect the credit due Mr. Stone personally; for, after all, it is his baby; he is the daddy, though a stepfather; the rest—well, they were doctors, wet-nurses, some solicitous maiden aunts, governesses, and “also rans.”

If Melville E. Stone had a Victor L. Lawson, a Frank B. Noyes, and a Charles W. Knapp, remember George Washington had a Thomas Jefferson, an Alexander Hamilton, and a John Marshall. If Melville E. Stone had a Charles S. Diehl, Napoleon had a Marshal Ney. If Melville E. Stone had a V. S. McClatchy, Abraham Lincoln had a William H. Seward. And had I the time I would wish to follow out this last analogy, for it is quite apropos, for you will recall that Seward had his doubts about Lincoln, but after being invited to obtain a more intimate knowledge of conditions and methods by becoming a member of the Lincoln Cabinet he became one of Lincoln's greatest admirers and most helpful lieutenants. I must not let this opportunity pass to emphasize the fact that Mr. McClatchy has been one of the most useful members of the Board of Directors, and has rendered services of incalculable value to the organization.

And I must not forget another who

has done wonders—I wish to refer to Kent Cooper, the efficient traffic manager who rose from our ranks. He has been to Melville E. Stone what Charles M. Schwab was to Andrew Carnegie. And Frederick Le Roy Martin, Mr. Stone's able assistant, who gave up a more lucrative position to enter the service of The Associated Press, and to have the benefit of association with a master mind. He is to Stone as William G. McAdoo is to our great President, Woodrow Wilson, God bless him and preserve him!

There are others who should be mentioned, but I am not narrating a history of The Associated Press; moreover, I have not the time to list them all. I mention but a few to show that Melville E. Stone has the happy faculty of winning confidences and enlisting the hearty and whole-souled co-operation of men of character and capacity.

I can imagine that some think that there would have been an Associated Press if there had been no Melville E. Stone. I grant this. But what kind of an Associated Press? Did any of the many illustrious predecessors of Melville E. Stone erect such high standards and successfully practice them in the gathering of news—news pure and undefiled—and at the

same time surpass in enterprise, promptness and accuracy the heretofore monopolists of great news feats? All was no accident. It was the result of the work of a master in the art of news-gathering; not for his individual gain and profit, but for the associated newspapers of the country. Gathered not to be trafficked in, but solely for public information.

Never did a man occupy a more trying position than Mr. Stone created for himself when he inaugurated and put into operation for several hundred newspapers representing every shade of public opinion a news service that was to be comprehensive, intelligent, enterprising and scrupulously fair and impartial, to be universally so recognized and esteemed. It all appears simple enough now that organization has been perfected and the newspapers and the public have faith. But it was a stupendous undertaking, and it needed a man of courage and pre-eminent ability, and, above all, perseverance and the faculty of dealing with men of most diverse and suspicious temperaments. Had I the time, and you the patience, I could recite innumerable instances in the history of The Associated Press where its reputation and its very existence rested on the integrity of Melville E. Stone.

He has borne the burden and taken the abuse, heroically, stoically, never losing his good nature; always affable, polite, considerate and most indulgent, but ever alert and watchful to scrupulously safeguard the interests of The Associated Press. Every member is treated as his personal friend, and in very truth I believe this is the case. No member was too small or inconsequential to have his best interests carefully and sympathetically considered. He could not have shown more concern and solicitude had he been financially interested in each and every one. It makes no difference to Stone whether one be Democrat, Republican, Progressive, Reactionary, Socialist, Christian Scientist or what not; all are the same, regardless of their politics or creed. They are members of The Associated Press, and they are his children—and therefore I name him the Father of The Associated Press.

Had Melville E. Stone applied his abilities to almost any other calling or occupation as he has given them without reserve to the affairs of The Associated Press, and enjoyed the usufruct of his efforts, he would have amassed an enormous fortune, besides winning a leadership of conspicuous distinction.

His good-fellowship, his scholarly

attainments and his human sympathies are marked characteristics of the man, and these qualities played no small part in the building of this great organization, in securing unity and strength, and in overcoming obstacles and difficulties most threatening at times; and then remember how his social graces caused The Associated Press to bulk large when he hobnobbed with and gave advice to the Kaiser, the Czar and sundry Kings.

To serve news daily to nearly one thousand newspapers, all more or less critical, and always alert (often too much so) to suspect the misuse of the news or discover some ulterior purpose in its presentation, demands a super-newsgatherer, a super-managing editor, a super-executive compared to the best required on the great newspapers. The Associated Press has in Melville E. Stone one who meets these requirements and is thoroughly qualified in every respect. Where is there another in this broad land equally qualified? I confess I know of no one; and I feel anxiety in the thought that all these splendid attributes may not again be found in one man, and that in the course of time several will be required to perform his duties, and for a full measure of equal success they will have to work in unison and harmony that will be difficult to

create and almost hopeless to maintain.

I salute you, Melville E. Stone, and from the bottom of my heart extend my congratulations and felicitations on the quarter of a century of your extraordinary service to The Associated Press, and, through its instrumentality, to our country and the world. And I am sure I echo the sincere sentiments of all members of the Association in wishing you many more years of happy, useful life as our guide, our philosopher and our friend.

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